

Tivoli Theater
709-713 Broad Street
Chattanooga
Hamilton County
Tennessee

HABS No. TN-207

HABS
TENN.
33-CHAT,
8-

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C.

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

TIVOLI THEATER

HABS NO. TN-207

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8-

Location: 709-13 Broad Street, Chattanooga, Hamilton County, Tennessee.

Present Owner: Eastern Theaters Corporation.

Present Occupants: City of Chattanooga.

Present Use: Theater (not Motion Picture).

Significance: The Tivoli Theater, built in 1920-21, is a well preserved and excellent example of the downtown Grand Palace Theater built throughout America in the 1920s. Its elaborate and exotic architectural and decorative detail, its conveniences, and luxurious materials combine to make theater going a complete social as well as entertainment phenomenon infrequently rivaled. Notable is its elaborate plaster work, rich colors and textures, marble, and theater organ. It was also among the first buildings in the United States to be air-conditioned.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1920-1921.
2. Architects: C. W. Rapp and George L. Rapp, Chicago, architects, with R. H. Hunt, Chattanooga, associated architect.
3. Original and subsequent owners: In 1920 Signal Mountain Amusement Company merged with S. A. Lynch Enterprise, which soon bought it out as Tennessee Enterprises, Incorporated. A few years later, Tennessee Enterprises was sold out to Paramount Theater Corporation for \$8,000,000, which was later taken over by Publix Theaters. The crash of 1929 forced Publix into bankruptcy, but the company reorganized and regained control as Eastern Theaters Corporation, a subsidiary of Paramount Theaters and then ABC Southeastern Theaters Incorporated, a subsidiary of Wilby Kinsey Theaters.

The theater is located in Lot 52, in the Chestnut Street plan of town of Chattanooga.

The following is the complete chain of title:

Bk. 435, p. 361, 2/14/1918

C. E. James to Signal Amusement Company, one story brick on Lot 52 at corner of Seventh and Broad Streets to be removed.

Bk. 435, p. 363, 2/14/1918

Hazel G. M. Montague and husband to Signal Amusement Company, for a piece of property: 100 feet on the east side of Chestnut Street between Seventh and Eighth Streets and 118 feet deep, being the west half of the Lot 52, for \$30,000.

Bk. 435, p. 364, 2/14/1918

J. N. Trigg and W. J. Dobbs and wife to Signal Amusement Company, for a piece of property: east 1/2 of Lot 52 Chestnut Street, fronting 24 feet on Chestnut Street and 24 feet on Broad Street, and 118 feet deep.

Bk. 435, p. 359, 2/24/1918

C. F. James to Signal Amusement Company, for a piece of property: north 25 feet of the south 75 feet plus 10 feet of the east 1/2 of Lot 52 and a strip at the rear of the Lot, 40'-10" wide, for \$27,000.

Bk. T-15, p. 374, 9/25/1920

Signal Amusement Company to Tennessee Enterprises. Correction recorded 11/11/1920.

Bk. S-17, p. 123, 8/2/23, correction deed.

Signal Amusement Company to Tennessee Enterprises all of lot 52 Chestnut Street in the town of Chattanooga. Recorded 8/4/1923.

Bk. 671, p. 500, 9/28/1933

Tennessee Enterprises, Incorporated, bankruptcy #6974.

Bk. 672, p. 326, 9/30/1933

Lease to Tivoli Theater, Incorporated, by Trustees of Tennessee Enterprises, Incorporated, bankrupt. Recorded 11/6/1933.

Bk. 704, p. 327, 4/26/1935

Trust Deed to Tivoli Theater Incorporated from C. L. Dooley,
Jr., Recorded 8/16/1935.

Bk. 712, p. 43, 8/5/1935

Charter - Tivoli Theater Corporation.

Bk. J-28, p. 218, 8/14/1935

Deed of Trust, Hamilton National Bank Trustees to Tivoli
Theater Incorporated. Recorded 8/1/1939.

Bk. 782, p. 441, 8/1/1939

Release, Hamilton National Bank, to Eastern Theaters,
Incorporated for lease.

1963

Eastern Theaters, Incorporated, for lease by the City of
Chattanooga for 2 years with renewal option of 5 years for
\$22,000 annually. Restricted from motion picture use.

4. Contractor, suppliers:

John Parks Company-

Contractor. (Mr.
Parks was unable to
complete the job
which was done by a
bonding company)

Suppliers:

Will Lindsey,
Napier Iron Works,
Chattanooga-

Steel work

Fred Cantrell Company-

Plumbing and
electrical work

Typhoon Fan Company-

Ventilation and
cooling system

A.H. Andrews Company-

Seats

National Plastic Relief Company-	Plaster work. (Italian artisans were reputedly brought here to do ornate wall decorations with figures and designs in plaster)
W.H. Burngarten and Company and Moore Valentine Company-	Decorations
New York Studios-	Scenery
Mosaic Tile Company-	Art marble
Stanley Frame Company-	Lobby display frames
Newman Brothers Manu- facturing Company-	Brass rails

5. Original plans and construction: The following paraphrased newspaper account records original plans and construction of the theater:

Chattanooga Times, March 13, 1921

2,600 yards of carpet for aisles, boxes, logs, approaches, mezzanine, stairs, and rest rooms. Electric fixtures for the entire house are plated with 14 karat gold, burnished, and ornamented with hand painted china. The balcony is supported by a 5,500 ton steel beam encased in concrete, and there are no columns or pillars. One million bricks were used. The proscenium opening measures 48 x 26 feet and is the largest in the south. The building has been under construction since last May. The lobby is noted for its marble floors, niches, tunnels, and promenades. The marquee extends the width of the building and has 15,000 watt capacity lamps, and on its underside are a number of 75 watt day light globes.

The outer lobby's ceiling is the same height as the building, and is enriched with massive plaster designs in polychrome and antique with Chinese and cobalt blue, mulberry, green, and buff over aluminum leaf. There are sectional plate glass mirrors at each end to reflect the ceiling. On the left is a seven foot fountain with running water and a figure of Cupid which is named "Cascatelle" for the river of many cataracts outside Tivoli, Italy. The floor is marble. It is lighted by a seven foot hanging

lantern in antique design. Glass doors lead to the inner lobby and the large plate glass window is hung with brilliant American Beauty plush draperies.

The ceiling of the inner lobby is similar to that of the outer lobby. The prevailing colors of the dome, panels, and medallions are blue and red with backgrounds of salmon and touched with gold. Cain stone is used in the side walls to the height of twelve feet. Large hanging chandeliers are suspended by velour chains with velour tassels and are plated with 14 karat gold and hand painted china.

The grand staircase features ornamented bannisters of copper bronze surmounted by mahogany handrails.

The foyer floor beneath the mezzanine is covered with Bigelow Axminster carpets in rose, ivory, and black. Two alabaster floor lamps each costing \$730 stand at the opening. The foyer is enclosed in glass with Grecian urns and ornament as decoration. Sectional mirrors are on all pilasters. At the right is a niche with a drinking fountain. At the left is a spacious lounging room and telephone booth.

The foyer promenade has solid carpets, chairs, lounges, and frequent standing lamps. This portion of the theater bears the name "Temple of Hercules" commemorating a historical edifice in ancient Tibur, the old name of Tivoli. The name is inscribed on a wall plaque.

There is a writing room to the left of the foyer furnished with desks, lounges, and standing lamps. The manager's office is at the right.

The auditorium is in the "Adam and Renaissance" style. It is finished in Chinese blue, mulberry, gold, green, and buff. The main dome is indirectly lighted with yellow and blue sky on aluminum leaf. It is also lighted with amber for a hammered gold effect.

The mezzanine dome is also indirectly lighted and had the same color motif. The dome allows the audience to be seen from the mezzanine but not from the stage. There are large coves in the balcony that are also indirectly lighted. There are openings in the rear of each. The box on each side of the stage represents the sunburst and they are draped with American Beauty rose silk plush draperies embroidered with gold. Identical drapes are used on the lodge and box railings.

The balcony is reached from the mezzanine via the "tunnel of Anio." The carpet is solid like the mezzanine and foyer and it is furnished with chaise lounges and standing lamps.

The mezzanine is the most beautiful section of the theater. It circles the auditorium and is the promenade. Its carpet is solid and it is furnished with chaise lounges and Adam designed chairs. It is known as "Villa D'Esta" after a famous villa at Tivoli, Italy. All openings are draped in silk with gold embroidery.

The proscenium opening is 48 x 25 feet, the largest in the south. Stage curtain is American Beauty Rose silk plush with gold fringes. All lighting is controlled from one switch board by one man. The scenery for pictures cost \$10,000. Prologues and pictures are projected on a stage two feet above the main stage measuring 22 x 17 x 6 feet. The canopy is transparent silk. The special picture set is embellished with silk columns lighted from within. The picture stage is covered with glass for special lighting effects.

The principal women's rest room is under the left mezzanine stair in the lobby. It is furnished with dressing tables, chairs, lounges, and with a French double plate mirror. It is called "La Regina" after a hotel in Tivoli, Italy. There is also a waiting room at the right of the mezzanine floor called the "Temple of Sybil", decorated with Adam design furniture. A third ladies room is on the balcony tunnel floor and is in French design named "Temple of Vesti." There is a telephone booth in the first floor room.

There is a men's club and comfort room under the right mezzanine stair in the lobby. It is called "La Sybilla" for a Tivoli hotel. It is decorated with red leather lounges, large arm chairs, and mannish brackets and fixtures. Another men's room is at the left of the mezzanine floor. The third men's room is of larger proportions and is at the right of the balcony tunnel floor called the "Villa of Hadrian" after the villa of the famous Roman Emperor in Tivoli. A telephone booth is in the lower room.

Other information: Architect Frank H. Dowler was responsible for the design concept of the new theater, which was based on two of the most elegant Chicago theaters, the Rivera and the Tivoli. His father, Will Lindsey of Napier Iron Works, Chattanooga was among the active planners and promoters of the new theater. Originally the job was expected to cost \$300,000 but the final cost was \$764,000 not including the purchase of the land. The price included \$32,900 for construction of smaller exterior and interior elements and for purchase of furnishings.

The auditorium had a capacity of 2,300 seats and measured 100' x 126". The lobby measured 50' x 106'.

6. Alterations and additions:

1924: The first major addition was that of a new organ in 1924. This Wurlitzer pipe organ was built in 1921 and purchased by a theater in San Diego for \$25,000. In 1924 the Tivoli bought it and sent it back to the Wurlitzer factory in North Tonawanda, New York for renovation. It was used in the Tivoli from 1924-1939 when it was shut down. It was removed from the orchestra pit and put backstage. It is a typical high quality theater organ. In contrast to church pipe organs, it has stops for drums, castinets, cymbals, and other percussion sounds and many orchestral effects and sound effects of trciens, autohorns, doorbells, or birds. The organ console and pipes weigh 2 1/2 to 3 tons and have 850 miles of wire and cables. It is run by a 7 1/2 horsepower blower. After 24 years the organ was restored in 1965 by five local members of the Association of Theater Organ Enthusiasts and was put at the left of the stage.

1931: In 1931 the Tivoli became the first public building in Chattanooga, reputedly the first in the south, and reputedly one of the first five public buildings in the United States to be air conditioned. The Carrier plant was built in Germany in 1931. It depends upon city water and deep well water (in the basement) to carry the heat away. Methaline chloride is the refrigerate.

1953: In 1953 the Tivoli theater erected the first cinemascope screen to be approved by 20th Century Fox in the city. Instead of the old 28 foot wide x 20.7 feet high screen the new screen was 45 feet wide and 25 feet high with a 4 foot inward curve. This was the second change of screen for the Tivoli. A few years early, it had erected the 3-D silver screen type. This 3-D screen could be used interchangeably as it could be elevated in the overhead area above the stage. "The Robe" was first cinemascope extravanganza released by 20th Century Fox and was the first film to be shown on the new Tivoli screen. The new wide screen was accompanied by an amorphic lens and stereophonic sound. Three large "horns" on "baffle" supported four base speakers and fifteen cells on top. Three of these speakers were required for the new sound but only one for ordinary projection. The frame came from California and the screen from New York.

1958: A new vertical marquee was erected to replace the old one that had been removed in 1946. The new marquee (extant) is much similar to the previous one. It is 40 feet high with four foot wide letters. Both the vertical and horizontal marquees were given

three neon strips instead of having the old lights replaced. Five layers of "chaser" (moving) lights replaced the old two layers. The cost of the marquee addition and renovation was \$7000 and it was done by the State Neon Company of Atlanta. The previous vertical marquee was added at some time in the 1930s.

1963: The Tivoli theater closed August 17, 1961. In 1963 through the efforts of De Sales Harrison, President of the Chattanooga Chamber of Commerce, the theater was leased by the city, renovated, and has been open ever since as a public auditorium. The architect for the renovation was James Franklin of Chattanooga. Renovation consisted of painting and patching which lasted six weeks.

1965: In 1965 the large center lobby concessions stand was removed.

1969: In 1969 new carpets were installed on the main floor and the ladies lounge was refurnished.

1973: The box office was enlarged in the vestibule.

Most of the original furniture, draperies, carpets, chandeliers, fixtures, etc. are now missing. However much of the original plaster work remains as does the variations of color. The architectural integrity of the building interior and exterior have not been seriously violated.

Also it is certain that many changes occurred over the years but the building was well kept. Mr. Emmet Rodgers, manager from 1921 to 1957, designed and supervised each redecoration of set pieces for the lobby as well as the color tones and draperies of the interior.

- B. Historical Context: On the theater's official opening on March 19, 1921, the premiere film, "Forbidden Fruit" was shown. Mae Murray, the film's star, was on hand to celebrate the theater's debut. The opening included speeches from the Mayor and other prominent city leaders. The film was preceded by the orchestra of 21 pieces conducted by Ira R. (Sandy) Summers playing "Orpheus." Afterwards came the Pathe News and then the feature.

Contemporary comments describe the theater as "a veritable temple of pleasure." A local newspaper stated: "true it is a commercial enterprise but those who promoted and secured the erection of this attractive addition to the architecture and social life of the city must be regarded as civic benefactors." Will Lindsey and Judge W.E. Wilkinson were among the promoters of the theater.

Emmet Rodgers, promoter and manager of district theaters for Tennessee Enterprises, Incorporated, was manager for the Tivoli from its opening in 1921 to 1957. He was responsible for many original promotional ideas that were copied and envied throughout the country. Rodgers was born in Chattanooga and his only professional training consisted of one year at the Chicago Academy of Art. He wrote, designed, and directed local talent prologues to the features. The theater maintained a shop for construction of sets and scenery. Mr. Rodgers expanded his operations and was doing two prologues each week in Birmingham and Atlanta. He had many offers to leave Chattanooga to go to California and New York to train theater managers and a few were sent here to train under him.

Tennessee Enterprises expanded in the 1920s, too. They had not only the Tivoli but leases for the Bonita, Rialto, York, and Bijou in Chattanooga, the Majestic, Strand, Queen, and Riveria in Knoxville, and the Palace and Princess in Maryville. But the Great Depression brought hard times and the company went bankrupt.

Live shows and vaudeville were common in the early years. In the thirties stage plays continued as did major attractions such as the Ziegfeld Follies, Fanny Brice, Helen Hayes, two appearances by Ginger Rogers, and Ray Bolger, as well as local talent. The Chattanooga Junior League's annual "Follies" were held here, and musicians Alex Keese who directed the symphony here and went on to radio, and Boris Morrosetal were among many others who made live productions a common luxury for Chattanoogaans. The shows were later terminated due to the effects of the Great Depression.

Chattanooga's first talking picture starring Delores Costello appeared at the Tivoli on July 9, 1928. The "Jazz Singer", the first "talkie", did not come till later.

The 1940s were a halcyon decade. The theater was filled every Sunday afternoon with soldiers from nearby Fort Oglethorpe. "Keep your Powder Dry," a motion picture produced at Fort Oglethorpe, premiered at the Tivoli.

Chattanooga's first television station went on the air in 1955. With the development of television and the corresponding mass movement to suburbia, center city palace theaters declined sharply. What's more, bad times fell on the Tivoli since the consent decree of November 1940 in Federal District Court at New York which broke up the monopoly that existed previously in the motion picture industry. This agreement restricted common ownership between producer and exhibitor. This affected the Tivoli in that in the early 1950s Paramount, the indirect owner of the Tivoli, built the Rodgers Theater with the understanding that the State Theater would not be deprived of profits.

In 1956 the State was acquired by Independent Theaters who, feeling they were not getting their fair share of first run pictures, filed suit against Paramount and Eastern Corporation. The resulting action meant the Tivoli lost control of top products, profits shrank sharply as operation costs were higher than other theaters, and Paramount was virtually restricted from using the Tivoli as a movie house. The Tivoli was closed in 1961.

In 1963 the Tivoli was reopened through a lease by the city of Chattanooga which stipulated that the theater may not be used as a movie theater. It has since been used for public attractions and live performances. The city has continued its lease to date.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

General description: The theater is a rectangle and is three stories in height. The front facade is three bays wide. The walls are brick which are technically for structural purposes. The front facade is faced with yellow brick and is decorated with a Palladian window, pilasters, and trim made of molded ceramic and terra cotta. A baluster crowns the theater.

The interior has a Palace Theater floor plan. Extensive plaster work may still be seen, as are the other important interior elements such as the curving promenade and the grand staircase.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Interviews:

Mrs. Emmet Rodgers, #412 Continental Apartments, Hixon Pike, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

Mr. Clyde Hawkins, Manager, Tivoli Theater, 709-13 Broad Street, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

B. Bibliography

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Hamilton County Deed Books, Hamilton County Courthouse, Chattanooga, Tennessee. Property records.

Scrapbook of Mr. Emmet Rodgers. Includes articles, clippings and original photographs. In possession of Mrs. Emmet Rodgers, #412 Continental Apartments, Hixon Pike, Chattanooga, Tennessee.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Newspaper articles:

Chattanooga Times, 3/13/1921, 13/19/1921

News Free Press. Date(s) not indicated.

"Tivoli of Chattanooga, Tenn., Latest Motion Picture Temple."
New Theatre Construction and Equipment Department, August 20,
1921, pp. 987-990.

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HABS Project Historian
1974

Edited by:

Susan McCown
HABS Historian
Spring 1985

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This project was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey in cooperation with the Tennessee Historical Commission and the East Tennessee Historical Society. Under the direction of John Poppliers, Chief of HABS, the project was completed during the summer of 1974.